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The Association Nutrition and Health – educational tool for students in Nutrition and Dietetics in Romania

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Abstract

"Nutrition and Dietetics" is a new study program initiated in Romania in 2008. The students in this line of study benefit from theoretical and practical training in accordance with European requirements. The Association "Nutrition and Health" was created to develop the practical skills of the students, as it should allow them to legally participate in educational activities. The way in which the students got involved and the actions they organized under the guidance of their teachers, as well as the results of these actions prove that the Association is a tool for education and training for future dietitians in Romania.

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1. Introduction

The new line of study Nutrition and Dietetics was initiated in Romania in 2008. The study program was started at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Iuliu Hațieganu" (UMF) from Cluj-Napoca and was taken over by three other Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy in Romania, i.e. Târgu Mureș, Iași, and Timișoara.

The students in this study program benefit from a theoretical and practical training as required at European level. As this is a new specialization, which prepares students for a new profession in Romania, it is very important for students to get involved in activities that should help to acquire new information, practical skills, and to communicate. The Association Nutrition and Health was created in order to complete the educational action and to put some theoretical knowledge into practice, as well as to create a legal framework for the conduct of these activities.

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This association aims at facilitating the access of students to actions meant to contribute to the shaping out of the dietitian in Romania – as new specialist in Nutrition and Dietetics.

In the modern view, the dietitian as graduate from Nutrition and Dietetics is the specialist who has knowledge about issues related to nutrition, prevention, at community and individual level, who intervenes in health promotion, in the prevention of harmful lifestyles and in nutrition education.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the Association Nutrition and Health is to create an organized framework for promoting a healthy lifestyle.

The Association Nutrition and Health is a Romanian private-law legal person, non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit, independent, with activities of civic education and of defense of the human rights [1].

The Association Nutrition and Health is a legal person governed by the private law, without patrimonial purposes.

The objectives of the Association Nutrition and Health are the following:

- To promote, study and research activities in the field of nutrition and food;
- To supply qualified support for the promotion, development and implementation of a culture of healthy nutrition according to the age and to the physiological needs;
- To provide support for the professional institutions and associations in the national and the international system;
- To educate the population on the role of nutrition in ensuring a good health, on the prevention and treatment of diseases;
- To provide qualified support for the promotion, development and implementation of a healthy lifestyle;
- To keep in touch with other associations or foundations, with legal or natural persons in Romania or abroad, which perform activities that can contribute to meeting the objectives of the Association;
- To organize and attend conferences, symposia, colloquies and other national and international meetings related to its specific topic;
- To publish specialized works or other categories of publications by itself or through other publishing houses, film or sound record companies;
- To organize lectures, seminars on topics related to nutrition and dietetics, to a healthy lifestyle;
- To facilitate and promote the free exchange of ideas, solutions, applicative studies and researches between different interested parties, directly, via the Internet or other communication means, in order to solve together the issues of the specific activities;
- To develop partnerships with public and private bodies in Romania and abroad in order to find appropriate answers and solutions for specific issues related to the healthy lifestyle.

The Operating principles of the Association

The Association operates under the following principles:

a) Dynamics Principle:

- Each member shall take active part in the development of the Association through suggestions, attitudes, opinions, critics, papers, innovations and other forms of participation.

b) Balance Principle:

- No extreme or extremist manifestations are accepted within the Association, irrespective of their motivation or nature

c) Legality Principle:

- According to this principle, the entire activity of the Association, at central and branch level, is performed according to the provisions in the Statutes of the Association, and in the legislation in force

The following groups shall operate under the patronage of the Association, according to the objectives mentioned above:

- Study groups,
- Documentation and research groups,
- Professional training and retraining groups,
- Education groups, according to the internal rules and to the legislation in force.

The Association shall organize permanent or temporary specialized divisions (depending on the acceded project, program)

The Association Nutrition and Health can affiliate with other national and/or international non-profit legal persons, in order to meet its purpose and objectives.

The Association Nutrition and Health can create subsidiaries or branches in Romania or abroad as territorial structures.

Members

The members of the Association Nutrition and Health are represented by three categories, namely:

a. Founding members, i.e. the persons who created the association and contributed morally and materially to its founding

b. Honorary members, i.e. individuals or legal entities who, through their activity, substantially support the association in achieving its objectives in terms of contributing financially, morally or functionally to achieving the aim of the association; personalities of the scientific, sportive or cultural life, with special achievements especially in the field of interest of the association and who support the association through their work

c. Supporting members – people who join the aim of the association and who support the achievement of its objectives. They are the students in Nutrition and Dietetics, no matter the university center where they performed their studies.

Activities

Through the Association Nutrition and Health, the students participated in actions with the following aims. Activities where it got involved:

- 9 May 2010 - The European Citizen – event organized together with the students from other faculties in Cluj-Napoca – organization of the Workshop “The European Student - Lifestyle”
- 17.05-27.05.2010 – Participation in the European educational project “Generation S” 1st Edition – projection of films on health topics in Braşov (“Ioan Mesota” National College), in Timişoara (“Ion Vidu” National Art College and UMF), Cluj-Napoca (Students’ Cultural House and UMF) [2]
- November 2010 – The Green Guerilla – event on ecological topics [3]
- November 2010 – Generation S – the 2nd Edition [4]

During this time they developed and created promotional materials such as:

1. Posters and brochures with information about the new specialization "Nutrition and Dietetics" at UMF Cluj-Napoca, intended for high school students in order to guide them towards a new future profession
2. A small guide on the nutrition label that aims at educating the population on the importance of labeling, its significance and how it should be understood
3. The Food Pyramid explained and accompanied by punctual recommendations.

In 2011, on 6-7 May, the first National Symposium of Nutrition and Dietetics students, entitled "Nutrition - Medicine of the Future", was organized, and it was attended by 104 students from the universities of Cluj, Târgu Mureş and Timișoara. Personalities in the field were invited to give lectures at this event. The symposium consisted of hearing courses to acquire new knowledge, organizing a round table on the "Dietitian - a Profession for the Future", taking part in a workshop on "Healthy Lifestyle". The following year, on 14-15 December 2012, the second edition of the Symposium "Nutrition - Medicine of the Future" was organized, but this time the participation was international, with the presence of the International Federation of Dietitians, of associations from the EU Member States (EFAD). For the first time in this symposium, 16 papers of students and graduates of this new line of study were presented. The event was attended by over 150 students but other professionals were also invited, such as physicians and pharmacists for them to become aware of the level of professional training of the future dietitians with whom they would work in the near future. This event was covered in the Romanian media and the press discussed for the first time about this new profession for which our students prepare [5-12].

Implications and Conclusions

The aim of establishing the Association Nutrition and Health was to create a legal framework that should allow the students of the new specialization in Nutrition and Dietetics from Romania to participate in activities that contribute to the development of practical skills useful in further professional training. Since the profession is new in Romania, the students do not have the opportunity to be trained by people with practical experience in the field, although the university curricula contain hours of practice in healthcare and catering establishments as required at European level. The creation of the Association Nutrition and Health, the way in which the students got involved in all the activities during the three years since its creation, the positive progress of how they managed to integrate through participation prove that this association is a useful means of education and training. Among the future reactions the association intends to perform, an important one is the exchange of experience with students in this line of study from other countries, such as Spain, Sweden, England or France, which are countries where this specialization has at least 10 years of existence.

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